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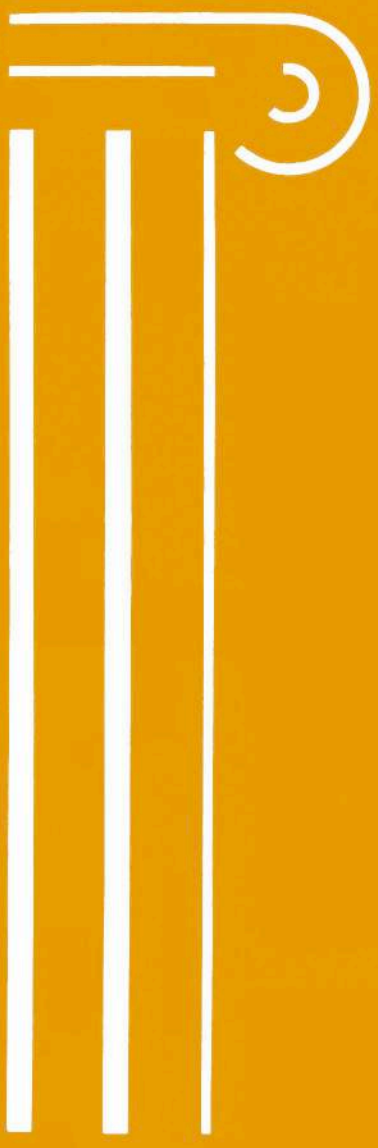

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CITY PLANNING ACTIVITIES IN MONTREAL

Address by AIMÉ COUSINEAU, C.E., Director, City Planning Department, Montreal

It is a great honour for me to be invited to speak before the members of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, and it is with pleasure that I have accepted the invitation of your President, my good friend Gordon McL. Pitts, to meet a sympathetic group of architects, with a large number of whom I have collaborated during the last twenty-five years, in my capacity as Sanitary Engineer of the Montreal Department of Health.

I come before you to-day to continue the good relations which have existed between us; but, this time, in addition, as Director of the City Planning Department, the activities of which must be closely related to the welfare of our community, when one considers the public health implications in planning the control of design and arrangement of cities for convenience, safety and the utmost possible satisfactory conditions. To this end, there is need for environmental sanitation, with opportunity for recreation, open spaces to permit adequate air and light, with freedom from the noises, odours and traffic of commerce and industry. Moreover, when possible, loss of travelling time between home and work should be reduced, congestion and overcrowding avoided. These are city and regional planning matters directly related to public health, because they decrease the danger of transmitting disease and prevent accidents.

I must say, by the way, that my acquaintance with and admiration for such men of international fame as Sir Raymond Unwin, Jacques Gréber, Eugène Beaudouin, Thomas Adams, Noulan Cauchon and others, and my academic interest in city planning for a great number of years, or since the foundation of the Town Planning Institute of Canada in 1920—which Institute unfortunately no longer exists—are somewhat responsible for my active participation to-day in the carrying out of the objective of the orderly development of our City.

Thanks to the broadmindedness and foresight of municipal authorities, our Department was created in May, 1941. Under the authority of By-law No. 1682, it consists of a director, his staff and an Advisory Committee. A few months later, the Building Inspection Division was transferred from the Public Works Department to the City Planning Department. This last innovation brings under one head all matters pertaining to construction of buildings, including the structural, zoning and sanitary viewpoints.

For the last two years, I had the great advantage of being associated, on our Advisory Committee, with its president, Councillor Aimé Parent, member of the City Executive Committee, and with other men devoted to the cause of planning, namely Professor Percy E. Nobbs, Messrs. Marcel Parizeau, Maurice Payette, and later, Harold Lawson, all of your Institute; also with Frederick Todd, landscape architect; the late engineer, Leonard Schlemm; a group of City Councillors keenly interested in this movement, including the Director of the Ecole Polytechnique, Mr. Armand Circé; Messrs. J.-B. Delisle, J.-H. Dupuis, J. B. Flanagan, Edouard Jeannotte, Claude Jodoin, and, finally, with my predecessor, the late H.-A. Terreault, and the Director of the City Public Works Department, Mr. H.-A. Gibeau.

The City Planning Department is, to all intents and purposes, a municipal department, responsible to the Executive Committee through the Director of Departments, Mr. Honoré Parent, K.C. Its Director is the co-ordinator of planning activities; he takes rank among the other departmental heads and has similar prerogatives and responsibilities. This means, in other words, that planning work in Montreal is now established on the same permanent basis as the other services, such as Health, Public Works, Finance, Police, Fire, and Public Welfare. It is a great step in advance towards order, health and efficiency in our community, and this new development should bring good results.

During the last twelve years, two municipal organizations have been set up by City authorities to study and report on various city planning and housing problems. The first, in 1930, was a Planning Committee, headed by A. Beaugrand-Champagne, and its membership included Ludger Venne, of your Institute; Raoul Lacroix, Frederick Todd, Leonard Schlemm, and also J.-E. Carmel and myself, as ex-officio members. This Committee was succeeded, after a lapse of about four years, by a Commission under the chairmanship of the late Mr. Terreault, who had formerly been Director of the City Public Works Department. I must add that about nine years previously, in 1921, an amendment to the City charter authorized the establishment of a City Planning Board whose duties were to make suggestions or recommendations deemed necessary or useful in connection with the improvement of the City. No effect was given, at the time, to this power granted by the Legislature.

Between November, 1936, and March, 1939, much valuable data have also been collected by the Planning and Research Department of the Montreal Metropolitan Commission, under the joint direction of George Mooney and Major Réal Bélanger. The former is now joint director of the Montreal Industrial and Economic Bureau, and the latter is with the Canadian Army overseas. These two gentlemen were assisted by Pierre Boucher, who, with a seven-year experience in this line of work, has become assistant-director of the newly-created City Planning Department.

With the above organizations and the data they have accumulated to supplement the thousands of plans and studies made by the engineers of the City Public Works Department, who have also been urging for several years the preparation of a city plan, but who had to use their allotted appropriations and time for immediate needs; with the co-operation of associations of architects, engineers and other professions, with that of the Property Owners' Associations, the Montreal Metropolitan Commission, the City Improvement League, the Board of Trade, the Chambre de Commerce, the Montreal Parks and Playgrounds Association, the Royal Automobile Club, the City Industrial and Economic Bureau, the Real Estate Board, and finally McGill University and the Ecole Polytechnique of the University of Montreal, under whose auspices several series of lectures have been given; with the invaluable assistance of the Press and of technical reviews; in a word, with all these factors as a background, the leaders of our population are now better prepared to appreciate the urgency of city and regional planning.

We feel, however, that our task is great but that it can, nevertheless, be accomplished with proper organization, competent personnel and close collaboration from interested professional and technical bodies, including transportation and public utility companies which are always planning their activities several years ahead of existing improvements or extensions.

Before proceeding further, let us review briefly the provisions contained in the by-law, already referred to, creating the City Planning Department and defining its responsibilities. It is the function of this Department, among other things, to

establish a master plan and prepare a report setting forth the principles of such a plan.

This is to be determined according to a programme covering the following points:

1. The streets, roads and highways to be conserved, modified or created.
2. The open spaces and the reserves, whether wooded or not, to be created, maintained or developed for establishing parks, public gardens, public squares, markets, parking areas, playgrounds, beaches, and for any other planning purposes.
3. The sites to be reserved for monuments and public buildings.
4. Natural, historical or artistic sites or monuments to be preserved in their present state or otherwise.
5. The zones and sites reserved for industries, public services, commerce, housing, low-rent housing, or any other specific category of construction, or for any other purpose.
6. The zones and sites prohibited for new industrial or commercial enterprises or the extension of the presently existing establishments.
7. The control and regulation of billboards, signs and advertisements of any nature whatsoever on public and private property.

In order to carry out this programme, the City Planning Department may entrust any appropriate municipal department with such studies and works as it is not in a position to do itself.

There are many other responsibilities entrusted to our Department, such as preparing, and recommending the adoption of drafts of by-laws dealing with such questions as building lines, servitudes, lotting and redistribution of lotted land, planting and protection of trees, cessions or sales of immovables belonging to the City, and, lastly, all questions pertaining to building, housing, zoning and regional planning for the whole of the island of Montreal.

In the matter of building codes, we know that, under the joint sponsorship of the Dominion Department of Finance and of the National Research Council, an authoritative document has been prepared which sets up principles on structural soundness, fire protection and adequate sanitation, which all important cities cannot ignore. We contemplate availing ourselves of the technical guidance of the National Building Code, in order to provide Montreal with a code that will give adequate protection, while allowing of reasonable latitude with regard to materials and methods of construction.

As far as our Plumbing Code is concerned, it is a modern one, needing practically no revision. Nearly all the health and sanitation requirements contained in the National Building Code are already in force in Montreal, and only minor changes need be made to the existing regulations.

With regard to zoning regulations, reference to which will be made further, great progress has been made towards the general application of their principles.

In the field of housing, on the initiative of Mr. Nobbs, a first report on a post-war programme for low-wage earners has been submitted to the City Executive Committee and forwarded to the Committee on Post-War Reconstruction, in Ottawa. It is evident that special attention should soon be given to the alarming shortage of dwellings which we are presently facing.

If one considers that there are about 90,000 vacant lots within the City, 50,000 of which are under municipal ownership, one readily recognizes that Montreal, under the help and guidance of appropriate government agencies, offers architects and engineers a great opportunity for opening up housing centres or neighbourhood units.

In short, the programme of the City Planning Department is twofold. First, a long-term objective, which is the preparation of a master plan aimed at providing healthful living conditions, in order to attain a well-balanced social structure. Second, a short-term objective, which is the interim control of buildings and their uses, and of other activities in the development of the city, while the master plan is being prepared.

If Montreal has made steps in the right direction in recent decades, it still offers a great opportunity for city planning. About fifty years ago its territory only covered approximately ten square miles; its area is now fifty square miles and includes twenty municipalities, annexed to the original territory since 1883. A rapid and unusual, but inevitable, growth has taken place, attributable to rural depopulation and industrial development.

As pointed out in a paper of mine published in the Journal of the Engineering Institute of Canada, a few months ago, it is obvious that the growth of the original City has not been scientifically regulated and, to a far lesser extent, that of the cities since annexed thereto, A carefully studied master plan for its territory, correlated with a regional plan for the whole island of Montreal and its immediate vicinity, is urgent, especially in connection with the Post-War Reconstruction Programme. I must add that the Government of Quebec has already developed an improved system of provincial highways leading to the outskirts of the City, to which certain city arteries must eventually be extended.

Opportunities would be given, in the preparation of a master plan, for the design of a rational system of main traffic thoroughfares, including more practical intercommunication between the city and the harbour, for the creation of new parks and the extension of the present ones, some of which are of exceptional beauty, and for the establishment of more and better recreational facilities.

Although interim and piecemeal regulations are not always desirable, the compilation of existing building restrictions for about half of Montreal, drawn up in the last few years with differentiated regulations as to heights and uses, will be of great help in the preparation of the comprehensive zoning of the metropolitan area. The work already undertaken is but preliminary to this desired result, which cannot be attained without the preparation of a master plan.

In recent years provision was made for certain main arteries and grade separations, adequate and potable water supply, and the construction of trunk sewers; but all future important and necessary public works should be planned in correlation with a regional plan for the whole island and its immediate vicinity.

The island of Montreal has therefore a great opportunity for growth control, with its 177 square miles of territory, of which area the city proper covers about 28%, while approximately 85% of its total population of about a million and a quarter resides within the city limits.

The movement towards decentralization of cities, or abandonment of central areas, has created in Montreal, as in other great cities, new problems and economic waste. This may be attributed, among other things, to unsuitable use of land and to inadequate distribution of open spaces; in a word, to lack of foresight. On the other hand, if decentralization has corrected over-concentration of population, it has caused internal degeneration of central areas, and with these migrations, as stated in a certain *Business Week* report, "have come in most great cities, demolition, parking lots, slums, and other changes in urban land use that shrink taxable valuations and pile up delinquencies". Fortunately, the need for rehabilitation has been better understood within recent years, and city planners have tended more and more to correlate their activities, not only towards effective decentralization, but towards the regeneration of blighted areas as well.

In a recent address before the Town and Country Planning Association of Great Britain, Professor Patrick Abercrombie, F.R.I.B.A., stated that the war has accentuated the decentralization problem and brought it into closer perspective, and

that his country is not only suffering from "war blitz", but from "peace blight" as well.

Residential and industrial decentralization, which I shall not attempt to discuss to-day, is a delicate question; this applies also to the alternatives to fringe developments, which Abercrombie suggests should be replaced by satellite towns or colonies, the latter having complete existence of their own. The author is of the opinion that there is scope for a Government Ministry of National Planning in Great Britain to prevent what he qualifies, constructively but quite severely, as "housing dumps", and by this he means, I presume, the beautiful cottage and flat estates we have seen or read about, a great number of which are so needed here.

Any city which finds itself in a state of arrested development and is desirous of co-ordinating its planning activities may well study the case of St. Louis, Mo., a city of about the same population as Montreal.

In the planning survey of St. Louis, a few years ago, recommendations for an urban land policy were made which, with a few minor changes, might apply to Montreal. Although progress has been made here in the right direction, allow me to summarize these recommendations very briefly:

1. Revision of zoning regulations to the scale of known laws of supply and demand for each different class of property use.
2. Strict enforcement of modern sanitary and building codes, including minimum housing standards.
3. Elimination of smoke nuisance. (And we know that its abatement has been a complete success, in St. Louis.)
4. Repair and renovation of old buildings not altogether obsolete, and removal of obsolete structures unfit for human habitation.
5. Development of neighbourhood units.
6. Construction of modern, large-scale, low-cost housing projects.

The St. Louis Plan Commission concluded its report by a real question: "Shall we gradually abandon St. Louis?"

Can we not ask ourselves the same question: SHALL WE GRADUALLY ABANDON MONTREAL?

Our answer may be contained in the brief review of our city planning programme, which I have undertaken to summarize, with full realization of the magnitude of the task.

It is unquestionable, as stated by the city planner of St. Louis, Harland Bartholomew, that the continued interest and participation of architects and engineers is indispensable in the planning of better cities, in gaining public support for and in aiding the official realization of such an ideal. It is also obvious that city planners are now thinking of cities or towns as living, changing, developing, but, not necessarily, growing organisms, the different parts of which have different functions, and also that cities are no longer considered as a collection of structures classified according to their uses and other elements.

I need not further stress before this audience the importance of direct action against the evils of bad or insufficient housing and planning. Suffice it to add that public authorities have learned from city planners how sympathetic the population is to any movement tending to a comprehensive plan, as soon as it realizes that the direction of city growth has been regulated and means taken to prevent economic waste, to preserve the element of beauty and the amenities, and, finally, to safeguard public health.

THE PERIODICALS SHELF

By ANTHONY ADAMSON

Every architect in Winnipeg, Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal, should read, buy and keep the March issue of ***New Pencil Points***. Repeat. Every architect in Winnipeg, Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal, should read, buy and keep the March issue of ***New Pencil Points***. This issue contains in elaborate detail the town plan of Chicago easily explained. Study of it will be invaluable to Canadian city architects if they wish to project their services into wider planning fields. Besides the maps and plans of the proposed development and rehabilitation of Chicago are three good "discussions on urbanism" by an architect, a doctor and a sociologist. Every architect in Halifax, Windsor, Brandon, Quebec, Edmonton, Regina, Victoria, St. John, Trois Rivieres, Port Credit and points East or West should read "The Town of Willow Run" in the March ***Forum*** if they want to do the same thing. Every architect in Stouffville, Pottsville, McMinniville, Cherierville and Hicks Corners could read "Rural Housing" in ***Architectural Design and Construction*** for March, without doing themselves any harm.

Architects who are following the series of articles on Prefabrication in the ***Forum***, which in the March issue discusses the house, might possibly like to see an article in the ***R.I.B.A. Journal*** for January on lessons in prefabrication from U.S. practice.

Architects in the Toronto Chapter, who have been considering in camera the condition of the profession, might be interested in the address of Lord Portal, U. K. Minister of Works and Planning, to the R.I.B.A. also in its ***Journal*** for January. He describes the setting up of a building industrial council with an industrial representation which he said he wanted to leave behind him as an organization to safeguard the building trade from the architect down to the operative. Currently there is little else on the problems of the profession.

The article "British Plans are Bold" in the March ***Record*** is worth reading and the same issue has a fairly comprehensive coverage of religious buildings, and one good New York State house eminently suited to Canada.

NOTICES

Attention of the members of the Institute who are on active service and received their copy of the March issue of the *Journal*, is drawn to the list of members on active service appearing in that issue. The secretary would appreciate being advised of any changes in rank, etc., and would welcome the co-operation of these members in keeping this list up-to-date.

The pamphlet "Canada, What About Housing" on sale at the end of April is brought to the notice of architects across Canada. It is a 48-page booklet laced with pen and ink illustrations selling for 10 cents.

This publication is chiefly the report of a Housing Conference arranged by the Ontario Association at the end of February. Part I consists of a report of the six addresses made at the opening of the Conference, followed by a report of the Conference discussion. The six introducing speakers and their topics are as follows: Professor Arthur on "The Town Planning Need"; Alderman the Rev'd. John Frank on "The Social Welfare Need"; Deputy Minister A. J. B. Gray on "The Municipal Problem"; Mr. Alfred Ward on "The Labour Problem"; Captain Rodney Adamson, M.P., on "The Political Problem". Part II consists of a report of the address given by Miss Catherine Bauer on Public Housing to the Ontario Association dinner. Miss Bauer is author of the book "Modern Housing" and besides many other things adviser to the United States Housing Authority. Part III consists of a summary of the Canadian housing problem with te ncommonly asked quesions answered concisely, as well as a bibliography, etc.

This pamphlet is obtainable from the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 230 Bloor Street West, Toronto, or at your booksellers.